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THE ROLE OF DOCTORS' SONS
IN THE LINCOLN ADMINIS-
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TO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
GOVERNMENT.

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THE ROLE OF DOCTORS' SONS IN THE LINCOLN ADMINISTRATION.*

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THE important part taken by doctors' sons in the régime of Lincoln does not appear to be generally known, if, indeed, it has ever been recognized. Nor, in the case of most of these participants, do the customary biographical sketches give any indication of the medical parentage.

Except as casually included in medical history and memorials, that side of medical life which may be termed the Sociology of the Profession has been but little studied. Kelly has explored the relation of physicians to botany, and doubtless there have been efforts in one or another direction that deserve mention.

Such a sociology represents a more democratic phase than does isolated achievement or individual prowess. And it might naturally be expected that

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in America it would have both a larger field and a sounder appreciation than elsewhere. There is now an abundance of material on the sociological side concerning the profession itself. Though in its entirety a large subject, many parts are sufficiently complete in themselves to admit of separate presentation.

In the historic interest of our members, to offset attacks on our calling, and as a genetic study, the gathering of material of this order has a larger warrant than merely to gratify curiosity.

Since the days of the Revolution no period in our country's history has been so stressful, so fraught with danger, and so seriously in need of wise guidance, as that of the Civil War. The leader of that time was Lincoln. The superior quality of his wisdom in action and in the selection of his immediate supporters is recognized. It consequently becomes a matter of deep interest to size up the mental atmosphere of his surroundings, and to see if any clear element is recognizable. That he had a true genius for gathering and utilizing opponents as well as presumable congenials renders any element in his make-up and entourage the more striking.

It is easy to pick out the men who officially and personally stood next to him, distinctly more so than most others, and this group became more pronounced as his administration progressed. At least four of these were his own choice; and doubtless he was consulted about the selection of some of the others. For the present purpose it is only necessary to give an outline sketch of each, sufficient to show his standing, relation and paternity. Most interested readers can fill in much from memory. The cases in point are as follows:

1. Judge David Davis, the private adviser and

legal friend of Lincoln, who accompanied him in both these relations on the momentous journey in February, 1861, to Washington, and remained in that capacity unofficially. He had not acquired at that time all the national reputation that came later (U. S. Judge, Senator from Illinois, and in 1881-3 acting Vice-President); yet he proved fully worthy of the confidence placed in him.

In the Republican national convention of 1860 Judge Davis (as delegate-at-large from Illinois) had secured the nomination of Lincoln, and after the election "was a chief councillor of the President."

Judge Davis was a son of Dr. David Davis, a physician of Cecil County, Md.

2. John Hay, Lincoln's personal private secretary, in later years U. S. Secretary of State. Nicolay, a German by birth, was the chief executive secretary, but Hay was the one in close confidential relations, perhaps more so than anyone else during the full period of Lincoln's administration. He was very young for such a responsible post, only 23 years of age at the start, though admitted to the bar.

Hay was born in Indiana, the third son of Charles Hay, M.D. (1801-84), a native of Kentucky and "a prosperous physician."

3. Then came the Vice-President, Lincoln's running mate in the campaign of 1860, the Hon. Hannibal Hamlin, ex-officio president of the U. S. Senate. His term did not expire until March 4, 1865. Hamlin was a lawyer, had been speaker of the Maine House, M.C., U. S. Senator, and Governor of Maine. Subsequently he was our minister to Spain. He was born at Paris, Me., the son of Dr. Cyrus Hamlin.

Dr. Hamlin was born in Massachusetts (1770), was a practising physician, and at times had filled a number of positions of local responsibility.

4. Solomon Foot (1802-66); never much in the public eye, and now little heard of. Yet as president *pro tem.* of the U. S. Senate (Feb. 16, 1861, to April 26, 1864), as floor leader of that body, head of its most important committees, potentially a line for the Vice-Presidency, and chairman of arrangements for the Lincoln inauguration in 1861, he was an invaluable aid at the transition time and for much of the Lincoln period. He was the most prominent advance agent who held over to the new era, a man of mature years and wide training, who come into his heritage of responsibility on the withdrawal of part of the members.

Foot had been professor of "natural philosophy at the Vermont Medical School, Castleton, 1827-31," lawyer, Speaker of the Vermont House, State's Attorney, M.C. (1836-42 and 1843-7), U. S. Senator (1851-7), and railroad president.

He was a native of Vermont, the son of Dr. Solomon Foot. His father, a physician, born in Connecticut, died when the son was barely nine years old.

The two secretaryships, of State and of War, were at that time unofficially, if not formally, recognized as the leading two cabinet portfolios. In this case the long term of service of the occupants show each to have been *persona grata* to the President. Everyone who recalls that period or is familiar with its history is well aware of the fact that in the general estimation these two men were Lincoln's main reliance and his most representative cabinet heads.

5. William H. Seward, Secretary of State. Seward

had previously served as Governor of New York and as U. S. Senator. Though he had been the chief competitor for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1860, he gracefully accepted and admirably filled the statesman's position in Lincoln's cabinet. He was the ranking member of that body, remained through Lincoln's whole administrative career, and subsequently engineered the purchase of Alaska. He was born in Orange County, N. Y., the son of Dr. Samuel Swezy Seward.

Dr. Seward came from Connecticut. In later years he "combined medical practice with a large mercantile business."

6. Owing to the peculiar conditions of the time, the cabinet officer next in importance was the Secretary of War. From Jan. 15, 1862, on, this post was filled by Edwin M. Stanton (who had previously been the U. S. Attorney-General in the cabinet of President Buchanan). By the necessities of his very important position, by continuance of service, and by personal association he was, next to Seward, the cabinet officer in nearest affiliation with Lincoln. Stanton was a lawyer by training, born in Ohio in 1815, and the son of Dr. David Stanton.

His father, "a prominent physician," was of Quaker stock, and came from an eastern State. He died while his son, Edwin, was a child, although not until he was some years old.

7. On the legislative side highly important for the administration is the Speaker of the Congressional House. From early 1863 on this position was filled by the Hon. Schuyler Colfax. He was a member of Congress from 1855 to 1869, and subsequently (1869-73) Vice-President of the United States. He was born in New York City, March 23, 1823, the second child of Schuyler Colfax, Sr.

The father was born in New Jersey, Aug. 3, 1792. He married Hannah D. Stryker, April 25, 1820, and died of tuberculosis, Oct. 20, 1822, five months before the son was born. Small wonder that there is a paucity of details regarding the father. An old account states that he studied medicine, and then took a bank position to earn means for starting in practice. Another biography indicates that he studied medicine in 1810-12 with Dr. David Marvin of Hackensack, N. J. Studying medicine with a preceptor instead of at a medical school was the more common way at that time. His widow disclaimed any knowledge of this, except that he and the doctor were old friends. But, as she was speaking long afterward, had been married in her sixteenth year, had but a short married life with him, and that some time after the date assigned for his studying, her lack of information on this point hardly counts. The positive evidence is sufficient to warrant including the name of the son in the present list.

Taken together, the seven men named were, next to Lincoln himself, the leaders in the executive and even the legislative work of the U. S. Government during that period. They were closest to him in official and personal relations, and, with the balance of the cabinet, constituted his special lieutenants, advisers, and administrative guard. It is consequently a notable fact that the seven were all sons of physicians, and this is the more striking as it is without known precedent. Of course, periods of such gravity and far-reaching interest are in themselves rare.

To read theories into or out of history is known to be as unprofitable as theorizing in medicine. Still, we have finally come to the stage in medicine

where it is possible to have profitable theories. And the more embryotic science of history may yet find activators.

To offer any generally acceptable explanation of this peculiar occurrence is hardly possible. To say that it was a mere coincidence is the simplest and most customary way. That, however, offers no explanation, and it is against experience and every theory of probabilities.

To suppose that it was definitely planned, as by one mind or some coterie, is quite as improbable. No incentive or reason appears for such a vast scheme. Nor is there any evidence or suggestion of such an effort. Nor, finally, can we see any way by which it would have been practically possible.

A further view comes up that cannot be as readily decided. Everyone is invigorated by a stimulus that appeals to him. Of all the educated and trained classes ~~and~~ in the community, the medical is the only one that in any real analysis stands heartily and with conservative wisdom by the whole people. Did, then, the sentiment, the national and intensely democratic spirit of the time rouse these men, because of their inherent attitude, more than it did others of possibly equal ability in the community?

There is an alternate way of looking at the matter that is rational and appeals more to medical minds. This grouping of prominent men was doubtless accidental, in the ordinary acceptance of that term; that it was so in the psychological sense is hardly imaginable. The drift of circumstances and the compelling necessities of the time had simply forced the selection of those specially suited to the extreme demands of the situation. Because it was involuntary and natural makes the occurrence the more significant.

We can grant that this combination of talent was just a coincidence—and yet draw a long bow. It affords strong evidence—perhaps the strongest possible—of the superior intellectual value of medical training and heredity. And those who attribute thereto an educational quality of basic character may see a direct verification in this development at a national crisis.

Besides his leading official mainstays it may be noted that Lincoln's leading competitors in the national campaigns of the period afford parallel illustrations. Seward has been mentioned above.

8. A leading opponent, both before and in the campaign of 1860, was Stephen A. Douglas, LL.D., United States Senator from Illinois. And it was with Douglas that Lincoln had just previously held the series of public debates that so stirred the nation. On the popular vote at the election Douglas was next to Lincoln, though behind Breckenridge and Bell on the electoral count. "Socially they were on friendly terms," and Douglas even held Lincoln's hat during the inauguration at Washington.

Douglas was born in Vermont, the only son of Stephen Arnold Douglas. The father, "a native of New York State and a prominent physician," died suddenly when his son was two months old.

9. In the campaign of 1864 Lincoln's opponent was George B. McClellan, General-in-Chief, U. S. A. General McClellan was a native of Philadelphia, the son of George McClellan, M.D. Dr. McClellan was born in Connecticut in 1796 and was widely known as a surgeon and professor of surgery.

That all talent of this kind was not exhausted in the first line trenches, to use a phrase of to-day, might be shown by innumerable examples; that, however, would not affect the main "exhibit."

It is natural in this relation to turn back for comparison to that other time of national tribulation, the Revolution. The surprising number of medical men who were signers of the Declaration of Independence has long been a matter of note. There were at least six with medical training, four of them practitioners. And in close correspondence with this is the fact that the Mecklenburg declaration in 1775 was written by Dr. Brevard, a surgeon.

At the Lincoln period, nearly ninety years later, the mantle of the fathers may be said, professionally speaking, to have descended to the children.

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